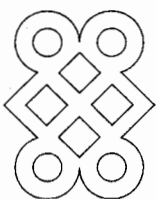


A HISTORY OF
ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

SECOND EDITION



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2002

 CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Islam under the Mughals

Indian Muslims formed numerous religious bodies divided by allegiance to schools of law, Sufi orders, and to the teaching of individual shaykhs, scholars, and saints. Some were Sunnis and some Shi'a, though this was not an absolute distinction, owing to the strong sympathies for the family of 'Ali among Sunnis. Sunnis were themselves divided between those committed to scripturalist Islam – to the beliefs and laws set out in the Quran, the hadith of the Prophet, and the Shari'a – and those devoted to popular Sufism, a form of religion in which veneration of saints, living and dead, with associated ceremonies of remembrance, mourning, and ritual marriages and funerals was the principal form of religious expression. One current in Indian Islam ran toward the disciplined, rational, and controlled practice of Islamic law: the other toward emotional faith and identification with the miraculous powers of saints. Into the first camp fell such diverse groups as the 'ulama', the organized schools of law, and Shari'a-minded Sufi orders. In the second camp there were the Sufi saints, and their descendants who managed their tombs, shrines, and the brotherhoods founded in their names. The two orientations led to different views about the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims. Popular saint worship blurred the religious distinctions among Muslims and Hindus; certain Sufi theories and cosmologies blended Hindu and Muslim concepts.

In the Mughal era, the 'ulama' were those scholars in the service of the state. The Mughals continued the Delhi Sultanate system of bureaucratic religious administration. Full control over the judiciary was given to a chief qadi. The provincial *sadr* was in charge of local judges, muhtasibs, preachers, prayer leaders, muezzins, and trust-fund administrators. He was responsible also for the appointment of muftis and for liaison between the government and the 'ulama'. His office provided stipends for scholars and sometimes included the power of making grants of landed property; waqfs were donated to provide income for shrines, tombs, and schools. He issued the daily allowances for religious persons and made payments out of the funds of charitable endowments. The *sadr* was also responsible for charities and for feeding the poor. In the course of the seventeenth century his power was checked by administrative arrangements which gave other officials control over and and by the creation of a more decentralized religious administration in the provinces. His judicial powers were also limited by rulers who involved themselves directly in religious affairs.

In the Mughal period, the influence of the Naqshbandis and the Qadiriis replaced that of the Suhrawardis and Chistis. The Naqshbandis cultivated a spiritual discipline leading to the vision of God, but they also insisted upon the necessity for active engagement in worldly affairs. The histories of two Naqshbandi shaykhs of the eighteenth century illustrate the religious and social principles espoused by the order. Mirza Mazhar (c. 1700–81), the founder of the Mujaddidiya branch of the order, came from a family of soldiers and administrators, and took up the Sufi life to avoid political conflicts and to control the violent impulses in himself. He turned

to Sufism as a way of finding tranquility and security in an uncertain world. His teachings stressed the harmony of the various Sufi traditions. He minimized the differences between the theosophical and legalistic forms of Sufism. His whole life was lived in cautious efforts to protect himself from contamination by food, gifts, and other worldly things which were all scrutinized for their legality and appropriateness. He also recommended celibacy. Mirza Mazhar never claimed the power to perform miracles, but his followers believed it of him anyway.

His successor was Shah Ghulam 'Ali (1753–1824), who stressed the social and political roles of the Naqshbandi shaykh, organized the *khanaga*, sent disciples to proselytize in Iran and Afghanistan, and distributed charity and spiritual and moral advice to supplicants. He used his moral influence with political figures whenever possible.

By contrast, other Sufi orders stressed veneration of saints. The Chisti order was originally built upon the personal religious insights of the founding teacher, but as time passed, the charisma of the saints was taken to reside in their tombs. Their descendants then served as the managers of their shrines and the organizers of the orders that flourished around them. The *pirzadas*, the hereditary descendants and managers of the saints' tombs, supervised the festivities commemorating the birth and death anniversaries of the saints, maintained public kitchens, led community prayers, and offered amulets along with spiritual and social advice. The growth of the shrines as centers of worship led to the accumulation of properties granted and protected by the state. The Mughals awarded landed properties to the Sufis, a practice which legitimized both donor and recipient and enabled the Mughals to intervene in succession disputes and to control the managers of the shrines. They converted the *pirzadas* into a petty gentry sensitive to the wishes of the political authorities.

In the sixteenth century the influence of Shi'ism was also very strong. Golconda and Kashmir were ruled by Shi'i princes. The Mughals had Shi'i wives and many Shi'a held high offices. The Indian Shi'i communities included not only the "twelvers," whose teachings we have examined in the chapter on Iran, but also the Nizaris and the Bohras. The Nizaris had their origin in a schism among the Fatimids. They were the "Assassins" of twelfth-century Iran; their mission in India began in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century in Sind and Gujarat. At first the Nizari communities in India acknowledged the supremacy of the imams in Iran, but in the sixteenth century the movement split, and only some of the Nizaris maintained this connection. Eventually the imamate was transferred from Iran to India by Aga Khan I, Hasan 'Ali Shah, who moved to Bombay in 1845.

With the collapse of the Nizari state of Alamut in 1256, the mission entered a new passive phase, concentrating on the symbolic and religious rather than the political expressions of its goals. Its teaching was that God was utterly transcendent and unknowable, and that he brought into existence the world of intelligences; religious salvation was seen to come from ascending the ladder of intelligences and returning to the first intelligence through which man achieved unification with God.

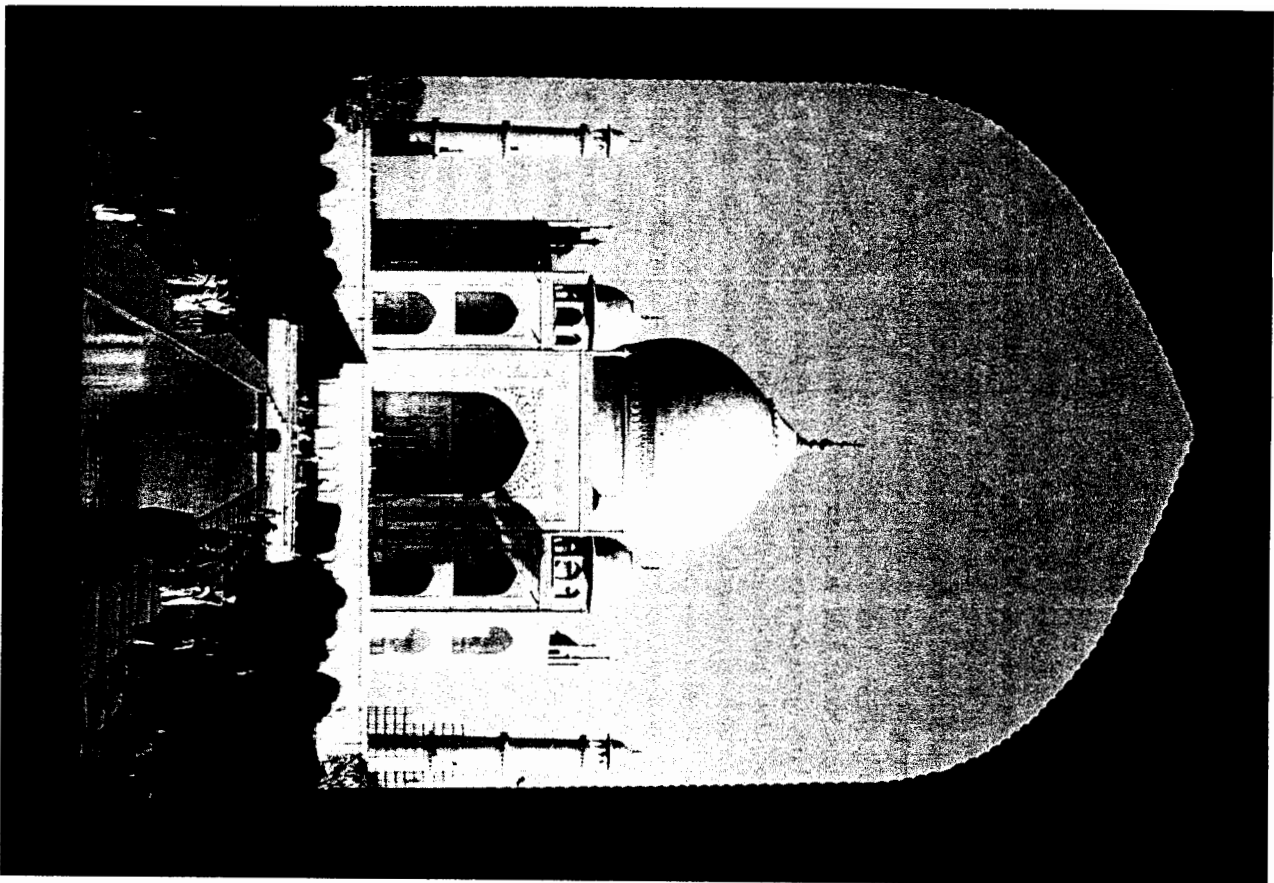
The Nizaris believed that the cosmic order was represented in history by prophets and imams who appeared in cyclical fashion. There were seven cycles of prophets, each cycle consisting of seven imams; the final cycle ends with the resurrection.

The Bohras had their origin in the same schism that gave rise to the Nizaris. With the disappearance of their imam, al-Tayyib, in 1133, leadership of the community was turned over to the *da'i al-mutlaq*. The *da'i* stands in a hierarchy that includes other missionaries, including the higher-ranking *buji'a*, *natiq*, and the imams. When the imams and the higher authorities are concealed, the *da'i* becomes the highest functionary in the social world. He is empowered to teach the community, resolve internal disputes, and name his successor in accordance with divine inspiration. He operates through agents called *amiris* and *shaykhs* who are the equivalent of 'ulama'.

The Bohra branch of Isma'ili Shi'ism was first established in Yemen, and the Bohras probably came to Gujarat in the early thirteenth century. A deputy called a *wali* ruled in India until 1539 when the first Indian *da'i* was appointed. In the long history of the Bohra community, there were several major schisms. In 1846, with the death of the last *da'i* of the Rajput line, the authority of the *da'is* was compromised. The nineteenth-century Bohras tended to regard them as administrative figures rather than spiritual teachers, and their leadership was challenged by the scholars.

The diversity of Muslim religious and social groups in India inspired conflicting concepts about the social meaning of Islamic religious belief. The Shari'a-minded conceived of Muslim society as cutting across lineage and class lines. They defined Muslims not by inherited lineage, position in the state, or occupation, but by individual belief in Islam which transcended all other social ties and made men equals and brothers in religion. While they recognized the importance of the Mughal empire, Islam in their view was still a universal community. Shari'a-minded Muslims stood for state enforcement of Islamic law and state-mandated subordination of Hindus to Muslim rule by discriminatory taxes and restrictions. By contrast popular Sufism took Islam to be an integral aspect of lineage, occupational, and neighborhood ties.

These differences of religious orientation were an important political issue in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the state pursued a policy of conciliation among different Muslim groups and among Muslims and Hindus, 'ulama' critics of Akbar opposed his religious toleration, his openness to non-Shari'a religious ideas, and his assumption of the prerogatives of a Sufi. The most important opponent of imperial policies was Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi. Sirhindi claimed to be the *mujaddid*, the renewer of Islam in his century, a man standing on the spiritual level of the early Caliphs. Initiated into the Naqshbandi order, he became the principal Indian spokesman of the Shari'a and reformist point of view. He taught that obedience to the teachings of the Shari'a was the key to its inner meaning, and modified Ibn al-Arabi's doctrine of the unity of being and the metaphysical basis of religious syncretism, in favor of the doctrine of unity of witness. He opposed the insinuation into Islam of Sufi and Hindu practices such as worship of saints, sacrifice of animals, and religious festivals. As a reformer he waged an unrelenting crusade to persuade



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the Mughal authorities to adopt policies befitting an Islamic state. He regarded Hinduism and Islam as mutually exclusive; it was the obligation of Muslims to subdue non-Muslims. Thus he urged rulers and nobles to impose the poll tax on non-Muslims, to permit the slaughter of cows, to remove non-Muslims from political office, and to enforce the Shari'a in every way.

Sirhind's great follower was Shah Waliullah (1702-63), who pursued the tradition of reform in different circumstances. In the declining age of the Mughal empire, Shah Waliullah was concerned with securing the Muslim presence in the subcontinent. After visiting Mecca, the center of reformist teaching, he stressed the importance of returning to the Prophet's teachings and the need to purge Islam of saint worship, which was subsequent to and inconsistent with the true meaning of the Prophet's life. He translated the Quran into Persian and made an argument for the use of independent scholarly judgment in the adaptation of the law to local conditions. While supporting the supremacy of Quran and Sunna, he attempted to synthesize the different schools of law and reduce the legal divergences among Muslims.

Shah Waliullah believed that reform required a Muslim state, modeled on the early Caliphate; to enforce the Shari'a. He defined the Caliph as the religious leader who is closest to the example of the Prophet, a perfect man who strives for justice and tries to use administrative and judicial techniques to lead his people to religious virtue. In Shah Waliullah's view, the will of God radiates through the Caliph into the feelings and minds of his subjects. Even in the absence of this spiritual function, a Caliph provides for the political defense of Muslim peoples and the organization of Muslim law. His duty is to enforce Islamic religious practice, collect the alms tax, promote the pilgrimage, foster study and teaching, administer justice, and wage jihad. This was a program of religious consolidation in the struggle against popular Sufi Islam and in opposition to a lax Mughal regime.

As a consequence of this pluralism, there was no sense in India of a universal or unified Muslim identity. The relation of the Mughal empire to Muslim religious life was conditioned by this pluralism. While the state patronized the small 'ulama' establishment, both 'ulama' and Sufis were generally independent. Reformist-minded 'ulama' who represented the universalistic Islamic ideal were often critical of the Mughal state for its cosmopolitan and imperial culture, its Hindu elite, and its patrimonial loyalties. Many pious Sufis withdrew altogether from political contacts, but Sufi leaders tended to be accommodationist and to accept state support and the legitimacy of the regime. Thus the legacy of pre-modern Indian Islamic organization was not state control of doctrine, teaching, or judicial administration, nor a history of well-established schools of law and 'ulama', but one of numerous autonomous and competitive Muslim religious movements.